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The European Union's 'Strategic Partnership' with the African Union

The European Union (EU) provides a unique instance where institution-building has transformed a regional institution into a global player, through such key achievements as the completion of the single European market, the adoption of a common currency, and enlargement from six to 27 members. It is therefore not altogether surprising that the rejuvenated Organisation of African Unity, now the African Union (AU) borrows a number of significant features from the EU template. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this attempt to transfer the European experience as well as the EU's stated eagerness to build a 'strategic partnership' with the African Union since its establishment in 2002. After a short description of the governance of the EU, three specific issue-areas are successively addressed: the EU's performance as a model and a mentor for the AU; EU support to 'pax africana'; lastly, EU-AU interactions towards the promotion of economic integration.

European Construction as an Ad Hoc Experiment

The governance of the European Union, through its mix of intergovernmentalism and supranationality, carries specific international implications. Europe's achievements in the field of economic, financial and monetary integration contrast sharply with the control retained by Member States in the field of foreign policy, immigration, security and defence. While Member States no longer have the capacity or resources to project relational power in a decisive and sustainable manner,¹ they remain adamant that, except on an *ad hoc* basis, sovereignty pooling should not include foreign policy, aid policy, defence or security. This accounts for fragmented patterns of policy-making and implementation and a 'capabilities-expectation' gap that permeates the conduct of external relations.

The combination of intergovernmentalism with supranationalism confers to the EU's external relations a strong structural component that contrasts markedly with its weak capacity to project relational power.² With respect to Africa, structural power essentially

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¹ Relational power refers to the classic definition of power as the ability of an international actor to get another player to do something it would not otherwise do through the use of force, diplomacy or aid.

² Structural power is the ability "... to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy ...[and] shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to

proceeds from the leverage generated by EU aid and trade policies due to deeply asymmetrical relations. Relational power remains the preserve of Member States, and depends on their ability to craft common policies at Council meetings.

The conduct of EU external relations is particularly bureaucratic. This results in part from the complex array of players involved in policy-making. These include the European Council (Heads of State and Governments) which agrees on the broad orientations of European foreign policy and external relations; the European Parliament which intervenes in the legislative process, budgetary control and supervision of first pillar policies; the (General Affairs and External Relations) Council formed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU; the rotating presidency (every six months, a different Member State assumes the presidency of the European Council); the High Representative for the CFSP (who represents the foreign and security policy that Member States define within the European Council and the General Affairs Council); and of course the European Commission, a community/supranational institution that is meant to be independent from Member States. Within the Commission, besides President José Manuel Durão Barroso, no less than four commissioners share the management of different aspects of external relations.³

The notion of a "capabilities-expectation gap" was coined by Christopher Hill to describe the discrepancy between what the EU is able to do in the international arena through its foreign policy or external relations instruments, and what people and governments both within and outside the Union expect or demand.⁴ The gap stems from an imbalance between insufficient (low) capability and excessive (high) expectations. EU relations with Africa have so far been a good example of the capabilities-expectations gap for three reasons: firstly, policy-making is conducted in a fragmented and particularly bureaucratic manner. Stated policies are often capped by tensions among Member States over common policies or their desire to retain control of what they consider to be key national prerogatives. Lastly, pledges have not been matched by adequate resources. As a result, there is a sharp contrast between EU stated ambitions and policy outcomes.

The EU and the AU: From Model to Mentor

The AU's new acronym is in itself an explicit reference to the model of the EU. The secretariat of the AU is now known as the 'Commission', while the former general-secretary of the OAU has been renamed President of the AU Commission. As in Brussels, the AU has commissioners. The Permanent Representatives' Committee, formed by African Ambassadors, seems to replicate the EU's Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER). Regional disparities among AU members are also to be addressed through the creation of the Community, Solidarity, Development and Compensation Fund, which is evocative of the EU's structural funds. In the areas of peace-keeping and security, although the UN Security Council provides the template for the institutional structure of the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC), its functions and ambitions are meant to be integrated within a Common African Defence and

corporate enterprises "; Suzanne Strange, *States and Markets*, London : Pinter, 1988, pp. 24-25.

³ Benita Ferrero Waldner (External Relations), Louis Michel (Development and humanitarian aid), Peter Mandelson (Trade) and Olli Rehn. (Enlargement).

⁴ Christopher Hill, "The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1993, pp.305-328.

Security Policy (CADSP) that clearly refers to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.⁵

The institutional architecture of the AU departs from that of the EU in so far as decision-making within the AU still is strictly based on intergovernmentalism, devoid of any sovereignty transfers and devoid of enforcement mechanisms. AU organs have their powers capped by the exclusive authority conferred to the "*supreme organ of the Union*", the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The AU is yet to establish institutions endowed with supranational powers that would give substance to comparisons with the EC, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. What is at stake here goes well beyond the ongoing debates over decision making within European supranational institutions.⁶ The AU Commission (AUC) has no autonomous resources and lacks any of the exclusive or shared areas of competence of its EU eponym. In spite of this, emulating the EU model without strictly adhering to it should not be viewed as a flaw that impairs the future of the Union. After all, the so-called founding fathers of the EU were themselves committed to build the "United States of Europe" until the failure of the European Defence Community necessitated the adoption of an alternative approach. The exclusively intergovernmental nature of AU decision making should not be viewed as lethal either. What makes decisions meaningful is policy adherence by Member States, not how decisions are reached.⁷ There is nonetheless a risk that AU institution-building processes will result in the establishment of organs devoid of much power and substance due to a lack of sustainable funding or commitment on the part of Member States. Institution building requires the growth of a sense of ownership that should not be confined to rhetorical pledges. The AU, unlike the EU, cannot rely on a stock of commonly shared values and criteria that can ensure its sustainability. Liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are listed by the Nice Treaty (2001) as "common values". The EC also has the responsibility to monitor respect for and identify possible threats to these values. In the case of "serious and persistent breach" penalties may even be decided by the EU.⁸ Respect for European common values is also listed among the pre-conditions (Copenhagen criteria) for the opening of negotiations towards membership of the Union. In effect, it is the "*lure of membership*",⁹ namely the magnetic pull exerted by the EU over its neighborhood that has most powerfully contributed to the transcription, internalization and legitimation of the Union's values and common legislation. Similarly, the agreements concluded between the EU and the

⁵ Omar A. Touray, "The Common African Defence and Security Policy", *African Affairs*, September 2005, no. 104, pp. 635-656.

⁶ Inter-governmental and neo-realist approaches point to the limitations of European integration and consider that EU Member States' preferences ultimately shape EU policies. Conversely, neo-functional scholar stress the limitations imposed on Member States by institutions, which in fine exert an independent influence on policy outcomes and contribute to the 'deepening' of integration.

⁷ Daniel C. Bach, "The dilemmas of regionalisation" in Adekeye Adebajo and Ismail Rashid, eds, *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*, Boulder Co.: Lynne Rienner, 2004, pp.69-92.

⁸ Website of the European Union ("Respect for and promotion of the values of the Union") at <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l33500.htm> (accessed on 12 November 2005). Sanctions were applied once, against Austria, following the electoral victory and appointment of populist and xenophobic leader Jörg Haider as minister in the cabinet of Chancellor Schlusser in February 2000. The effect of the sanctions had been inconclusive when the ban on bilateral political relations with Austria was eventually lifted in mid-October.

⁹ Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century*, London: Atlantic Books, 2003.

ACPs or with the countries of the southern fringes of the Mediterranean assume that the lure of *partnership* can bolster the diffusion of European 'common values'.

The EU publicly portrays the AU as a new strategic partner, but EU-AU relations are not necessarily at the centre of the multiplicity of interactions between the EU and the continent. The EU-Africa dialogue also has a broader span than an EU-AU dialogue since it includes Morocco. The EU, for intrinsic reasons, is naturally prone to encourage 'organisation to organisation' interactions, namely continental/regional rather than bilateral policies. There is also currently, both within the European Commission and the European Parliament, an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards initiatives that may contribute to AU capacity building and empowerment.

The EU-Africa dialogue should not be dissociated from this broader picture. It is in 2000, with the organisation of the EU-Africa summit in Cairo, that interaction between EU Member States and Africa for the first time acquired a truly bi-regional dimension. The summit involved every single African country as well as the then 15 EU Member States. The continent's new pan-African momentum has since then contributed to set the foundations of what has is commonly described in Brussels as a "constructive partnership" between the two institutions. EU-Africa dialogue has, however, been confined to meetings between ministerial troikas since the adjournment *sine die* of the April 2003 Lisbon summit meeting.¹⁰ This transformation of bi-regional summits into ministerial troikas has contributed to a shift away from the rhetoric of summitry. Since 2004, the troikas' regular meetings have also actively involved the EC and AU Commission, entrusted with the preparation of agendas and identification of concrete work programmes. This decision, originally adopted at the November 2003 meeting of the AU-EU troikas in Rome, has in turn prompted the establishment of parallel dialogue between the two Commissions.

It is therefore not altogether surprising that as the Fourth Ministerial meeting of the African and European Troikas, held in Luxembourg on 11 April 2005, the Luxembourg presidency of the Council stressed that "*the EU considers the AU as its main counterpart within the EU-Africa dialogue, being understood that Morocco remains associated in a pragmatic way*".¹¹ Six months later, on 12 October 2005, an AU-EU 'Commission to Commission' meeting was also convened in Brussels on the very day of the adoption of the European Commission's proposals for an *EU strategy for Africa*.¹² The EC-AUC meeting, which gathered the chairmen of the two institutions as well as eight AU and 19 EU Commissioners, was meant to be more than a symbolic event: a joint work plan was adopted, along with the strengthening of institutional ties, the pursuit of "*regular political and institutional dialogue*" and "*twinning programmes*" between commissioners entrusted with similar portfolios. Ad hoc support to the AU was reiterated in accordance with the principle of subsidiary, namely in those areas where "*pan-African approaches and strategies have an added value*".

NEPAD has also become a significant component of the EU-Africa dialogue. Governance features at the core of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and at the December 2004 meeting of the Troikas, the EU agreed in principle to support

¹⁰ Dissent over the attendance of Robert Mugabe is at the origin of this decision.

¹¹ The Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU, *EU non paper on EU-Africa Strategic Partnership*, (Working Document), Brussels: 11 April 2005.

¹² Commission of the European Communities (CEC), Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, *EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa's development*, Brussels, 12 October 2005, COM (2005) 489 final.

financially the APRM Trust Fund. Since then, support to the APRM mechanism has been brought into the broader perspective of "*aiding the results of [APRM] reviews to be developed into country action programmes*".¹³ The credibility of the APRM carries implications that range well beyond the framework of EC-AUC interactions. Indeed, many European countries consider the mechanism as a path-setter for the build up of Africa-based 'agencies of restraint' in the field of good governance and human rights. Yet, as the cases of Zimbabwe or the Sudan illustrate, the greatest challenge in the short term lies with those countries that do not wish to submit themselves to any peer review.

Pax Africana as the Cornerstone for 'Consensus Building'

Conflict prevention and settlement was labelled at the Ouagadougou EU-AU ministerial meeting of November 2002 as a model case for enhanced Europe-Africa cooperation. Since then, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), established by the AU as the decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts has become the primary vehicle for EU support to the AUC. The AU's readiness to assert and undertake new responsibility matches well with the EU's overall concerns that in the post 9/11 world, peace and stability need to be more tightly integrated with development agendas. The sharp departure from the cautious politics of the OAU and the assertive stance adopted by the AU also contributes to mobilize fresh attention within the different organs of the EU. To quote but one example, on 14 January 2004, the European Parliament adopted a lengthy and dithyrambic resolution congratulating the AU "*on the gradual development of a principle of 'non-indifference' and its willingness to intervene in individual member states in the event of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity*".¹⁴ Within the G-8, the EC has also been an active campaigner for enhanced international support to the AU's empowerment in the field of peace and security.

In February 2005, a memo prepared in anticipation for one the preparatory meetings of the G-8 Gleneagles summit argued that: "*The time has now come for the international community to recognise the AU as the most important African political interlocutor on peace and security issues. In the future it is the AU that should guide efforts to prevent, manage, and resolve armed conflicts in Africa. The best support the EU and other international partners can offer is to respect and affirm the principle of African ownership of both the challenges and solutions of the African peace and security agenda. If we look for a strong and autonomous partner organisation we should act accordingly...*"

AU demands for support also offer the EC valuable opportunities to go beyond traditional 'aid and development' agendas. For EU Member States too, support to peace-keeping in Africa has been viewed as an opportunity to test the new ambitions assigned to ESDP after the crisis in the Balkans offered a "*striking confirmation*" of European weakness in the field of conflict prevention.¹⁵ It was in Africa that the first autonomous

¹³ *Joint Work Plan*, mimeo, p. 2.

¹⁴ The resolution of the EP also noted that "*the credibility of NEPAD will depend on the decisions – some of them involving difficult cases – taken by the AU regarding countries that fail to respect the APRM criteria in the medium term*"; European Parliament resolution on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (2003/2106(INI), Strasbourg: 14 January 2004, para.19, p.6. (www.europarl.eu.int accessed on 23 November 2005).

¹⁵ Jean-Yves Haine, *ESDP: An Overview*, Paris: Institute for Security Studies of the European Union, April 2004, p.1.

EU Military operation was launched, when EU troops were deployed without recourse to NATO assets and capabilities in the town of Bunia, in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between 12 June and 1 September 2003. This operation, code-named Operation Artemis, was set up as a response to growing fears that the confrontation between rival ethnic based militias supported by Rwanda and Uganda would develop/deteriorate into ethnic cleansing. Since the MONUC could not cope with the situation, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for the deployment of an Interim Emergency Multilateral Force (IEMF) that would prepare for the reinforcement of UN forces and mandate. It was at this stage that the EU expressed its readiness to intervene and, after defining a common stance, dispatched around 2,000 troops. France acted as the 'framework nation' and supplied most of the 1,100 soldiers engaged on the ground in Bunia.¹⁶ By early September, Operation Artemis and the EU transferred the authority back to a reinforced MONUC force.¹⁷

It is hard to tell whether Operation Artemis occurred because "*France... judged it politically advantageous*" to intervene under the EU banner in a region where its presence had been highly contested, or whether "*EU high officials in the Council saw it as a good opportunity to heal the bitter political differences among Member States on intervention in Iraq and give a boost to ESDP*".¹⁸ In the event, peacekeeping in Bunia was as much a test as a symbol. Operation Artemis provided a testing ground for the EU's new security doctrine and its aspiration to "*a much longer-view on crisis management and conflict prevention*". For the civilian population of Bunia, the operation was a success: it restored security, allowed humanitarian assistance to be provided and brought an end to the immediate crisis.¹⁹ Operation Artemis also played into the publicly stated ambition of EU Member States to transform ESDP into a device "*to enhance Europe's role in the world*".²⁰

Operation Artemis was conceived from the onset as a rapid deployment operation that should involve no risks of 'mission creep'. So as to prevent any expansion of the Operation beyond its original goals the IEMF was mandated to act as an interim force and focus on a territorially limited area, Bunia, and its immediate surroundings. As the UN's Peacekeeping Best Practice Unit later observed: "*The IEMF's mission was narrowly conceived, and for that reason more likely to achieve its goals. First it intervened within a well-known, tightly constrained time period and geographic scope and armed elements had only to withdraw...beyond the force's reach and wait out the*

¹⁶ French forces formed about 85 per cent of the contingent which also included 70 troops from Sweden and 100 men from British engineer units. In addition, 750 troops were also deployed in Entebbe and 100 in Kampala. The Operation's headquarters were based in Paris where 40 to 50 per cent of the officers originated from the 12 other European participating countries. Fernanda Faria, *Crisis management in sub-Saharan Africa. The role of the European Union*, April 2004, Occasional paper no. 51, Paris: Institute for Security Studies of the EU, April 2004, p. 42.

¹⁷ As part of its mandate to back up the interim administration and promote grassroots reconciliation, the EU also provided a €200 million aid package drawn from the European Development Fund (EDF). In 2005, a 30 strong police mission was also deployed in Kinshasa (EUPOL Kinshasa) to assist in the establishment of an Integrated Police Unit (IPU).

¹⁸ Faria, *Crisis management*, p. 41. EU involvement was facilitated by French and British concern at building cooperative ties over Africa since their adoption of the St Malo declaration on Africa, signed in December 1998 by President Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister Tony Blair and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

¹⁹ United Nations (UN), *Operation Artemis: The Lessons of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force*, New York: PBPU, October 2004, pp. 15-16. (<http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Artemis.pdf>, accessed on 23 November 2005).

²⁰ Jean-Yves Haine, *ESDP: An Overview*, p. 8.

mission. While the situation in Bunia was stabilized, the rest of Ituri [province] continued to grapple with insecurity and during the period of its deployment, massacres did occur not too far from where the force was...".²¹

Operation Artemis reflects the pattern of interventionism without engagement that permeates European and US approaches to conflict prevention and peace-keeping in Africa. European military interventions, whether they occur under the aegis of the EU or proceed from individual commitments, do not really depart from what was, already in the late 1990s, provocatively described as "constructive disengagement",²² an approach centered on the build up of African capacity in the field of conflict management.

The European Commission's specific support to AU-led peacekeeping efforts has developed on an incremental basis, in conjunction with two key instruments, the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) and the Africa Peace Facility (APF). The RRM was established by the Council in 2001 so as to enable the Commission to address political or emergency related situations in countries "*undergoing severe political instability or suffering from the effects of a technological or natural disaster*".²³ Unlike humanitarian aid, the RRM is meant to be a crisis management tool.²⁴ It is on such grounds that aid amounting to €25 mio in 2002 and €30 mio in 2003, has been allocated to the operational activities of the PSC and AU capacity building. An important step towards enhanced EC commitment was the signing, on 2 April 2003, of the EC Programme in support of AU peace building and transition activities. The programme was originally designed to fund mediation and peace-monitoring activities of the PSC, along with support to AU capacity building *in the transition period* (emphasis mine).²⁵ The basis was also set for a "*regular Addis Ababa based dialogue and coordination between donors and the AU commissioner for peace and security*"²⁶.

Unlike the RRM, the APF (€ 250 million drawn from the ninth European Development Fund, EDF) is specifically conceived to strengthen the capacity of African organisations, coordinated by the AU. Contributions to Peace and Security Operations are eligible, based on the assumption that conflicts make sustainable development impossible. The APF was established in 2004 as a follow up to the request formally presented made by African leaders at the AU Maputo summit of July 2003.²⁷ Prior to the establishment of the APF, EU contributions to peace building in Africa had to be channelled through the UN or through EU developmental and humanitarian aid"²⁸. In this respect, the APF represents an expansion of EC intervention capacity into the field of sustainable security.²⁹ By the end of November 2005, the APF had financed six

²¹ UN, *Operation Artemis*, p. 16.

²² Eric G. Berman and Katie E. Sams, *Constructive Disengagement; Western Efforts to Develop African Peacekeeping*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, ISS Monograph series, no. 33, December 1998.

²³ EU, "the Rapid Reaction Mechanism",

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cpcm/rrm/index.htm (accessed on 23 November 2005).

²⁴ Disbursement of the RRM's specific budget benefits from 'fast track' bureaucratic procedures. Programmes are administered within the External Relations Directorate General (RELEX), by the unit in charge of 'Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and ACP Countries Political Issues'.

²⁵ AU then estimated the cost of AU peace and security mechanisms at US\$ 100 million for a 3 year period.

²⁶ Commission of the European Communities (CEC), *Communication from the Commission to the Council; The EU-Africa dialogue*, Brussels, 23.6.2003, COM(2003) 316 final, p. 9.

²⁷ The PF is funded through contributions drawn from the EDF envelopes of all sub-Saharan states.

²⁸ R. Keane, "The African Peace Facility Uncovered: Better late than never?", *European Security Review*, 24 (October 2004), p. 10

²⁹ The Peace Facility is administered by DG RELEX and the Council, unlike EU aid policy that is administered by DG DEV and ECHO.

Peace and Security operations and projects, along with one capacity building programme: €12 million were committed in support to the deployment and operation of the AU Ceasefire monitoring commission in Darfur (AMIS I); €80 million for AMIS II and €70 million for its extension. Two contributions of €3.38 million and €8 million had also been made to support in Central African Republic the *Force Multinationale en Centrafrique* established under the aegis of CEMAC (FOMUC I and FOMUC II). In addition, €6 million have been pledged to the AU in support of capacity building of the AU PSD. Activities targeted for support include the establishment of the secretariat of the PSC, the creation of a pool of regional desk officers in Addis Ababa so as "*to facilitate interaction with the regional mechanisms in the field of peace and security*", the establishment of a continental Early Warning System and "setting up a Panel of the Wise", etc.

For the EC, providing financial, staff and logistical support to the AU and its peacekeeping mission has meant an unprecedented "*shift from [the EU policy of] focusing on economic co-operation to concentrating on peace and security matters*".³⁰ The APF has provided the EC with an opportunity to become involved in programmes in the field of peace and security where there is a clear link to development objectives.³¹ In an area that used to be the exclusive preserve of Member States, the EC has been allowed to develop autonomous policies. The contribution of the EU-AU partnership to peacekeeping in Africa has, however, turned out to be particularly disappointing so far. The African Union Mission in Darfur (AMIS) was widely considered in 2004 as a stepping stone towards a new Africa-led approach to peacekeeping. Two years later, the extent of the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Darfur had transformed the all-African operation into a case for urgently 'rehatting' or folding the 7,000 'green helmets' into a UN peace-support mission.³² AU peacekeepers failed in curbing the spread of violence due to a combination of factors: financial constraints, lack of experience and logistical problems in the management of a large-scale peacekeeping operation were compounded by the Sudanese government's reluctant endorsement of their deployment and a "monitor and report" interpretation of their mandate. By mid-2006, the AU, cash-strapped and heavily dependent on Western support, was being forced to come to terms with the option of a transition towards a stronger international UN force. As the AU Banjul summit came to a close on 3 July 2006, Sudan's ongoing rejection of a UN peacekeeping operation imposed on AU leaders a further postponement of the withdrawal of AU forces. In spite of the dramatic humanitarian situation in the Darfur, AU heads of state carefully avoided defining a stance that might be interpreted as a criticism to Khartoum's implication in the perpetration of violence.

The Economic Partnership Agreements: Flawed Expectations

EU-AU relations are underscored by a new concern within the EC that it should address Africa as "*one entity*" and "*reinforce its dialogue with the pan-African institutions*".³³ A first area of investigation has been the practical measures that may contribute to build "bridges" between the three different agreements that exist between EU and Africa:

³⁰ In: *European Voice*, 27 January 2005.

³¹ The Commission is merely constrained by the need to secure the 'green light' – or confirmation of political appropriateness in euro-speak – from the Council's permanent Political and Security Committee.

³² Human Rights Watch, *Imperatives for Immediate Change; the African Union Mission in Sudan*, January 2006.

³³ CEC, *EU Strategy for Africa*, p. 1.

namely the Cotonou agreement with the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) with South Africa (2000) and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreements (1995) with four out of the five North African countries – there is no political agreement between Libya and the EU. Potential areas for reform listed by the Commission in 2003 included: more careful monitoring of the impact of the three trade-related instruments on pan-African trade; procurement rules have also been identified as another area for reform, so as to ensure that North African countries can be eligible to tender for EDF contracts or for South Africa's European programme for Reconstruction and Development (EPRD), and reciprocally.

The Cotonou agreement still remains the overarching framework for European relations with Africa. Signed by the EU and the ACP countries for a period a twenty years in 2000, Cotonou is of direct relevance to the AU since its signatories include all sub-Saharan African states.³⁴ Since their formal launching in 2002, negotiations towards Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and Member States of sub-regional groupings have proceeded at a slow pace, not least due to ACP concern about the overall implications of liberalizing trade with the EU on a reciprocal basis. ACP weariness equally concerns implementation of the principles of reciprocity and differentiation as much as the regional integration component of the Regional Economic Partnership Agreements (REPAs), renamed Economic Partnership Agreements at their request. What is really at stake in the negotiations is also blurred since all Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have been offered the option of special and differential treatment under the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative.³⁵

The four negotiating groups that have been formed by African countries for the purpose of negotiating EPAs with the EC are also a source of confusion since they do not match with the morphology of regional organisations. In West Africa, the ECOWAS and UEMOA negotiating group has been broadened to include Mauritania. In central Africa, Sao Tome belongs to the so-called CEMAC negotiating group, which excludes a number of Member States of ECCAS, the Regional Economic Community that spans across this part of the continent. Those members of ECCAS that are not party to the CEMAC negotiating group are instead party to that of East and Southern Africa (ESA), an entity that only includes 16 out of the 19 COMESA Member States due to the exclusion of Egypt, Swaziland and Angola.³⁶ In Southern Africa, what is casually known as the 'SADC-minus' group includes the BLNS (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland), Angola, Mozambique and Tanzania. South Africa has observer status.

The four African EPA negotiation groupings cast a crude light on inconsistencies that African states have allowed to build up. Current negotiations towards the conclusion of EPAs could turn out to be, paradoxically, a valuable incentive for the establishment of the African Economic Community. Due to the EU's insistence that "*an individual state can only be a member of a single trading arrangement with the EC*"³⁷, the long overdue

³⁴ South Africa has a qualified status since membership of the ACP group excludes trade and aid packages that fall under the TDCA.

³⁵ EBA is WTO compatible since it applies to all LDC economies. It will become relevant as an alternative to EPAs offered to LDCs once the waiver for the ACP's current system of non-reciprocal trade expires on 31 December 2007.

³⁶ Members of the ESA negotiating group are Burundi, Comoros, DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

³⁷ Speech by Commissioner Poul Nielsen at the launch of the SADC-EU negotiations; 9 July 2004, Doc 04/355-09/07/2004.

'rationalization' of the regional groupings' landscape has received a totally unexpected jolt. This could turn into a trigger for a positive overhaul of the inconsistencies of the existing regional landscape. Indeed, defining common positions within the so-called SADC minus group is bound to be highly problematic so long as it will have to reconcile the tariff implications of BLSN membership of SACU with those of Tanzania's adherence to the East African Community. Conversely, the ESA negotiating group is likely to encounter intractable difficulties if it keeps trying to overcome the contradictions generated by Tanzania's decision to withdraw from COMESA while claiming to be committed to enhanced integration with Uganda and Kenya within the East African Customs Union.

As it currently stands, the list of eight regional economic groupings labelled as 'regional economic communities' (RECs) by African heads of state and government does not match with the forty year old OAU decision to divide the continent into five regions – it also happens to exclude the regional organisations (SACU, UEMOA, CEMAC) within which economic integration is most advanced. Conferment of REC status by the AU has become deeply politicized due to what may be described as the politics of pre-eminence and pre-emption. While rationalizing overlapping memberships and interactions between sub-regional groupings remains much talked about, REC status seems to be viewed as a passport for survival and legitimacy. Since the emerging landscape does not address the issue of multiple memberships, RECs are turning out to be an additional source of confusion. The recent decision of the AU to concede REC status to the EAC (July 2005), does not augur well in this respect. This can only contribute to entertain new expectations, and fuel a scramble for pre-eminence among regional groupings. EPAs are bound to exert deep implications on the morphology of the current building-blocks. What remains unclear is whether the AU and its Member States will undertake responsibility for a long overdue rationalization process, or, alternatively, if this will be the outcome of an externally-imposed process.

Partnership between the EU and the AU over pan-African *economic integration* has been devoid of much substantive content so far. Opportunities for joint working agendas are limited by the overarching framework of the Cotonou Agreement and the requirements of WTO compatibility. AU-EU interactions also involve players that, besides being extremely uneven in terms of structural power, are intrinsically different entities. In the field of regional economic integration, the AUC is still the powerless spectator of its Member States' lackadaisical transcription of the ambitious objectives assigned to the African Economic Community (AEC) and its sub-regional economic organizations.³⁸ The EU is an arena where common economic and monetary issues are crafted and negotiated before implementation by Member States become mandatory. On these very issues and despite the fifteen year old blueprint contained in the Abuja Plan of Action (1991), the AU operates as an international organisation, a mere forum for discussion. In this context, it is not surprising that such key issues as the strategic implications of Cotonou for the AEC are not being seriously addressed. Instead of toning down the scramble for REC status, AU summit meetings keep fuelling it, as illustrated by the admission of the EAC to REC status since July 2005. This contributes to undermine the credibility of the AEC as a project. It also widens the gap between pan-African tree-top economic integration and bottom up regionalism. For all these reasons, the EPA negotiations could be unique window of opportunity for stock-taking. Unless

³⁸ Daniel Bach, "The Global Politics of Regionalism: Africa", in Mary Farrell, Luk van Langenhove and Bjorn Hettne, eds., *Global Politics of Regionalism, Theory and Practice*, Pluto Press, 2005, pp. 171-186.

the AU manages to control its Member States' pick and choose approach to regional economic integration, EU pressure for a rationalization of multiple memberships could well usher the cannibalization of existing regional economic groupings. The resulting shockwave could also prove to be the best way to trigger the reordering of interactions between the long overdue, much resisted and highly dysfunctional patchwork of African regional economic IGOs.